

Your letters



Build new lines

I do not think Bedford-Sandy is the best link for re-establishing the east-west rail link.

A better route would be a four-mile new line from the Bletchley-Bedford line at Ridgmont to Flitwick on the Bedford-London line, followed by a 10-mile new line, from Westoning (south of Flitwick) straight to Hitchin.

The terrain is relatively flat with no major obstacles. No tunnels or major bridges would be needed.

This route would be about 10 miles shorter than via Sandy and nearly half an hour quicker because it wouldn't use most of the slow Bletchley-Bedford line.

Also it would not clog up about 10 miles of the East Coast main line. This would crucially increase the viability of the whole Bristol-Oxford-Bletchley-Cambridge-Norwich route.

It is also more likely to get off the ground because it would consist of two stages which could each be justified in their own right. The four-mile first stage is shorter than the Bedford-Sandy reinstatement, so it would cost only about £100million, and it would link Luton and Luton airport to the West Coast main line, Oxford and Bristol, as well as linking the huge Milton Keynes expansion area to Luton, the airport and London St Pancras International. With electrification from Bletchley to Flitwick it could also be a West Coast main line diversionary route as well as a Milton Keynes Thameslink route, all for about £200million.

The second stage would create the whole Bristol-Norwich railway with attractive journey times. A further half-mile link in Hertford would create a through link to Stansted!

I suspect one reason why the Bedford-Sandy link has got nowhere over so many years is because planners recognise it is not the most direct or best route.

Why can we only ever envisage reopening old railways, never building new ones?

I also believe the £1billion Network Rail underspend should be used to

start the UK's high-speed network north of London. A 65-mile-long 200mph line from just north of Tring on the West Coast main line roughly following the line of A41 and M40 roads to Birmingham International at just over £15million per mile. The pay-off would be London to Birmingham in under one hour, with a massive increase in capacity and reliability.

Later a tunnel into and through Birmingham, out to the M6 and northward would eventually deliver London-Glasgow-Edinburgh in under three hours.

As an alternative, why not use the £1billion to eliminate some of the absurd bottlenecks in the West Coast main line:

1 Coventry-Birmingham

A continuous passing loop in each direction between and through Hampton in Arden and Berkswell stations extending for a mile west of Hampton and east of Berkswell.

2 Birmingham-Wolverhampton

A continuous passing loop in each direction between and through Sandwell and Dudley, Dudley Port and Tipton, to be built in stages if necessary.

These two measures would increase capacity by up to four express trains an hour in each direction, while improving speed and punctuality – with no adverse effect on stopping services.

3 Macclesfield-Manchester

A continuous passing loop in each direction through and two miles either side of Adlington, Cheshire, station.

This would greatly reduce "conflict" delays between express and stopping services.

4 Stoke-Macclesfield

A continuous passing loop in each direction for two or three miles on the northern side of Stoke, and the northbound platform at Kidsgrove to be set back to allow express trains to pass here also.

This in conjunction with item three would allow the reinstatement of Stoke-Manchester stopping services without adverse impact on express services.

5 Crewe-Preston

The existing passing loop from Crewe to just south of Winsford sta-

tion to be extended through Winsford station and for one mile north of the station.

At Acton Bridge station there should be two northbound tracks – one for stopping services to stop at the platform and one for the non-stopping services.

This would eliminate "conflict" delays between express and stopping services.

Apart from the conflicts of running express and stopping services on the same track, the other main obstacle to journey time improvements and punctuality is movement conflict at major junctions.

Virgin services take up to 15 minutes for the six miles from Manchester to Stockport because of this conflict south of Manchester Piccadilly where more than six east-west trains per hour in each direction have to cross the north-south tracks. I would propose:

6 East-west cut-under (or flyover) at Ardwick

This would eliminate all east-west versus north-south conflicts, so cutting five minutes off London-Manchester timings.

7 Crewe Station

To avoid directional conflicts here I propose:

Bay platform for Manchester-Crewe stopping services to be created alongside platform one track at north end of station.

This would eliminate the absurd situation where in the morning rush-hour both platforms one and five can be blocked by waiting local services.

To use platforms 11 and 12 for all Manchester-Cardiff services, with a 200-metre link line down to the existing "avoiding lines" under the main north-south lines, so none of the Manchester-Cardiff services conflict with north-south express services.

8 Norton Bridge

Grade separation between the currently conflicting northbound Birmingham-Stoke and Manchester services and the southbound Glasgow-Preston-Crewe-Birmingham and London services.

Most Birmingham to Manchester services currently lose five minutes between Stafford and Norton Bridge waiting for clearance to cross the north-south line.

My final suggestions would be:

9 Crewe-Wilmslow

Extend the passing loop south of Chelford station through the station and for one mile to the north

This would eliminate "conflict" delays between express and stopping services.

10 Nuneaton

Grade separation to allow Coventry-Nuneaton-Leicester services.

All the above should cost less than £1billion, which phased over say a five-year period is modest in comparison with what has already been

spent.

These measures would make the difference between a theoretical high-speed, punctual reliable railway and one which actually works in practice.

Major rail projects can increase land and house prices by 10% or more in some cases. Why not modernise the tax system to automatically recoup some of this for the Government and the project?

We could replace stamp duty with a low capital gains tax on housing profits – say 5% on houses selling for up to £250,000, and 10% for those above £250,000.

Assuming Crossrail increases the value of two million homes in the Greater London area (average value about £250,000) by 10%, a 10% CGT of the increased value would yield £5billion.

Together with a similar automatic profits tax on commercial premises this would almost completely fund the project.

It would also be politically popular because "upfront" stamp duty is greatly resented, and a "backend" tax only on profit, not on total value would be seen as much easier to pay and much fairer.

M Rothwell

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Back to basics

Railway managers need to get back to basics if my experience is anything to go by.

I arrived at Heald rail station near Manchester airport on the bus with my eight-year-old grandson bursting to go to the toilet.

We had to find some suitable bushes because the toilets on the station had been permanently closed even though the station is not unstaffed. I was told by the man in the ticket booth that the toilet closure was because of the "dangers of paedophiles".

Those clever modern managers should give us back our toilets and learn how to manage their business without making victims out of their "customers".

Nigel Barnes, 102 Chester Road, Poynton SK12 1HG
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Green Express

Green Express Railtours have promoted special trains from the Midlands and the north for 17 years, and, in that time, experienced great upheaval in railway management and operation.

Responsibility for timing a special train changed from British Rail, to Railtrack, to Network Rail. I, like many, was sceptical at yet another reorganisation and the creation of a vast timing zone for the north within Network Rail.

Almost a year on, the progress is impressive. This year has been the best

for prompt arrival of train times. It gives confidence to the promoter, who for years has dreaded what is going to churn out of the fax machine at a couple of days notice.

A clear timing sheet posted a couple of weeks before a tour is great. It gives a chance for an amendment to be considered. For the passenger on the train, local traders can be alerted to a sudden influx of visitors, and for the administration of a tour, it saves hours dealing with anxious passengers awaiting their train tickets.

This in turn helps the finances of the railway "family" as more trains can be promoted with confidence. With charter trains paying for track, station and depot access (rather than receiving revenue support) we help, albeit in a small way, to reduce everyone's train operating costs.

With a change from London to a northern office, in Manchester, this has seen the marketing of charter trains throughout the country. This upheaval is now bearing fruit and there is a resurgence in the charter train market. While charter trains are a minute part of the railway "family", it is a good test of the health of the rail industry when mainly small businesses feel confident to invest personal money in promoting special trains.

Nick Harvey, proprietor, Green Express Railtours, 66 Stonegate, Hunmanby, Filey YO14 0PP

Practical help

All Railfuture members interested in the future of the East-West rail link should consider doing something positive about preserving what is there already. One of the most helpful things members can do is to take a trip on the Bedford-Bletchley line which will be the core section of the long-distance route.

Currently it is operated as a branch line but if there are cuts in this service, or even worse a threat of closure, the East-West rail link will never be realised and it would dash hopes of any future service from Milton Keynes to Oxford or Bristol or of an extension eastwards to Cambridge or St Ives. Please use the existing line and encourage others to do so.

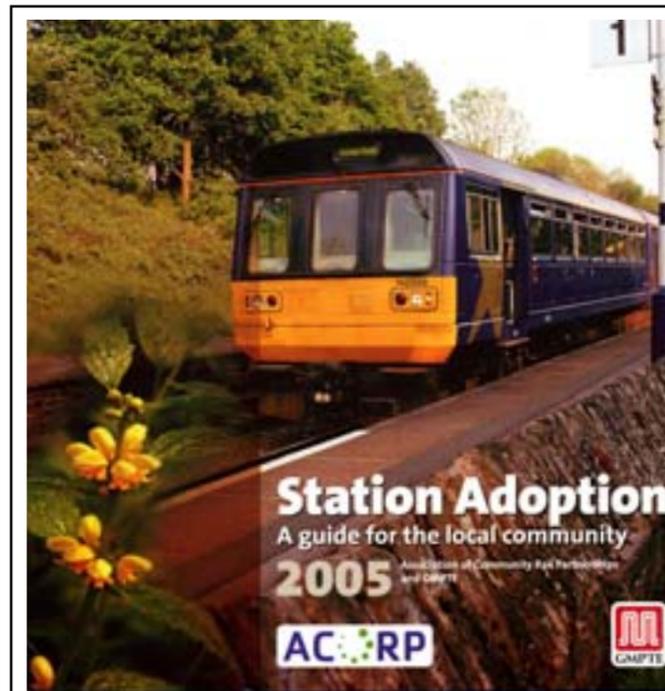
W G Pilsbury, 45 Chantry Avenue, Kempston, Beds MK42 7QX

Amtrak surprise

The editorial comments in the last *Railwatch* concerning possible cuts in Amtrak's long-distance services in the USA came as a surprise to me and my partner who travelled many of these routes in May this year and also two years ago.

At no time did we hear of such threats. On the contrary, we consistently came across US citizens using trains for the first time and finding it enjoyable, many saying that they would do this again rather than using the plane.

Indeed I believe that it is the airlines which have suffered a downturn in patronage, particularly since 9/11 while Amtrak, which was set up in 1971 specifically to rescue the rail industry after many years of



Adopt your local station

A new booklet could prove useful to local rail user groups and may encourage more outside organisations get involved in helping to improve their local stations.

With 52 colour pages, the booklet was published in June by the Association of Community Rail Partnerships with help from Greater Manchester Public Transport Executive.

ACoRP hopes the toolkit will be of interest to a wide range of community groups and individuals. More and more local stations are being adopted by their communities. These are usually the smaller unstaffed stations which have lacked "tender loving care".

Station adoption is a way of turning stations round and bringing them back into the heart of the communities they serve. Printed copies of the booklet are available for £6, post free, from ACoRP, Rail and River Centre, Canal Side, Civic Hall, 15a New Street, Slaithwaite, Huddersfield HD7 5AB.

Eric Stanley has won ACoRP's community rail award for "outstanding volunteer contribution", in recognition of his work at Settle station, north Yorkshire.

neglect, has been allowed to invest. There has been a resurgence in passenger usage.

We noticed that even in the space of two years, passenger numbers had increased with many trains running almost full, despite the long distances covered with overnight travel often involved. I would be most puzzled if such a success story was rewarded by cuts in Government funding.

A word of warning though to anyone thinking of using Amtrak, the services are very slow, probably averaging 50mph, with trains sometimes being stopped between stations for lengthy periods.

The lines are mostly single track and freight running seems to take priority. Delays in arrival of up to six hours are not uncommon. Also if boarding a train late at night or early morning, you will find, as we did, that no matter how long you have been kept waiting, refreshments are not available and there is no compensation offered for late arrival. So don't be too

critical of customer care on British trains where standards are generally higher.

On a final note we hired a car and found the American "gas guzzlers" on the whole to be better drivers than their British counterparts, displaying more patience and tolerance, generally sticking to speed limits and showing a high degree of respect for pedestrians.

P D Currie, West Acres, Alwicks, Northumberland

Editors' note: It's good to hear you enjoyed American trains. But rail campaigners in America have been fighting a long campaign to prevent federal budget cuts which would have crippled Amtrak. The National Association of Railroad Passengers was crucial in mobilising support for Amtrak.

Safety first

The spate of bombs on the London Underground will probably discourage some people from travelling by this means, and understandably so. It is up to rail campaigners to continue to argue that

road transport remains less safe on a day-to-day basis.

Yet having said that, I must admit that I'm not a fan of the Tube. I am amazed they let so many travellers stand on trains, as the more crowded they are, the harder it is to get away in an emergency. Buses have limits on the number of standing passengers. Why don't trains?

Also, I think now is the time for London to consider overground developments, similar to the trams at Manchester and elsewhere, rather than continuing to expand the Tube. For tunnels do make it more difficult in the case of disasters.

Terrorists are hard to beat, but we can make the rail network safer for everyone.

Tim Mickleburgh, 33 Littlefield Lane, Grimsby, DN31 2AZ
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Joined-up railway

Although nominally privatised, the UK rail industry is now under very tight Government control.

It is therefore rather odd to see that the award of a replacement rail franchise – Thameslink and Great Northern – by a Government agency might be referred to the Competition Commission by the Office of Fair Trading.

Since each of these bodies is associated with government it seems that "joined up" thinking has no part in the management of the industry. I also wonder what the justification is for the existence of such bodies, each apparently feeding each other with work.

Should not these matters be resolved within the Ministry before tenders are requested for a franchise in order to prevent such unnecessary activities?

Alan D Crowhurst, 1 Mawley Court, Lower Inhedge, Cleobury Mortimer, Shropshire DY14 8AH

Heritage mail

For 20 years I have campaigned to save as many as possible of the traditional red British telephone boxes. Many of the K6 boxes are located in or near railway stations. I managed to save several K6s inside the former Dover Marine station at Western Docks. They were listed and are now there for posterity.

I urge Railfuture members to ensure the K6 survives at railway stations. Check with your local council if it is not listed and do all you can to ensure their survival.

Many have survived in conservation areas but BT does not now respect conservation areas.

The K6 is under constant threat from BT which however is required to display a 42-day notice inside any box it proposes to remove. That's your signal to take action.

G R Wanstall, Flag House, Herne, Kent CT6 7LL

Editors' note: The opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect Railfuture policies. Send your letters to The Editors, 4 Christchurch Square, London E9 7HU. Railwatch also welcomes articles.



Real investment

I have recently returned from a trip to Andalucia in southern Spain. It was quite apparent that there is a lot of investment going into railways in Spain, while the level of rail fares is very much lower than here in the United Kingdom.

I noticed three major pieces of investment taking place, much of it in difficult mountainous terrain, and all to do with increasing capacity and/or speed.

The investment projects I saw were:

■ Construction of a branch of the Madrid-Sevilla high-speed line to Malaga

■ Straightening out the main single-track Malaga-Sevilla line between Fuente Piedra and Dos Hermanas

■ Double-tracking a number of stretches of the single-track RENFE local line from Malaga to Fuengirola.

In all, many millions of euros are being spent on these projects.

At the same time, fares are significantly lower than the UK. On the Malaga-Fuengirola line (total distance 20 miles), single fares range from 72p to £1.07.

Similarly, the return fare between Malaga and Sevilla (147 miles each way) is £19. The single fare is £16.55. Plainly neither RENFE nor the Spanish government is resorting to the fare box as a source of funds for this investment.

I returned to the UK to overhear an incredulous couple being charged £52 for the privilege of two return tickets between Heathrow and Paddington.

I myself paid the £6 to get me to Hayes and Harlington on Heathrow Connect.

My son recently paid £93 for a walk-on single ticket from Durham to Chelmsford via London (284 miles, excluding the Underground which was included in this fare). Shades of "rip-off Britain"?

In the meantime, I hear no mention of any plan to increase the capacity of our railway. Not very good for a country that is supposedly the fourth richest in the world, and somewhat richer than Spain!

Howard F Thomas, 24 South Primrose Hill, Chelmsford CM1 2R6

Letters Extra

ONE shortcoming

I have found the Network card very useful over a number of years in obtaining reduced-rate rail travel on the former Network SouthEast area.

Recently, however, I was unable to use my card on a Saturday evening at Chelmsford station because the ticket office was closed.

However, I did receive a £10 travel voucher as compensation after writing to ONE Railway.

I would also like to see ONE Railway running later trains from London Liverpool Street. In the latest timetable, the last train to Chelmsford leaves London at 00.18 on a Saturday night.

As many functions in London do not finish until after midnight, one either has to leave early to catch the train or go to the added expense of a hotel room – hardly an inducement to use the train.

Roger A Smith, 67 The Street, Little Waltham, Chelmsford, Essex CM3 3NT

Diesel pollution

I was shocked on a recent trip through London Paddington by the noxious fumes and particulates belching from five or six diesel trains in the station. This must be a serious safety hazard for passengers and even worse for staff who have to spend their entire working day in the area.

Ironically, there were several police sniffer dogs on the station following the London bombs.

Mrs Bridget J Brown, The Grove House, 65 Grove Road, Tring, Herts HP23 5PB

Editors' note: Electrification is the answer.

Barnstaple routes

The letter in *Railwatch* 104 from Mr Duddridge contains many relevant points, but also a number of inaccuracies, and above all does not consider what is the most viable proposal for a second rail link into Barnstaple, something of which frequent airing of the subject in this area is also guilty.

The conversion of the old railway trackbed from Barnstaple to South Molton into the new North Devon link road creates only a minor problem for restoration of a rail line.

For almost all that distance laying a track by the side of the link road would be a relatively simple task, because one thing that is never going to happen is the road being converted into a dual carriageway. From South Molton to Dulverton relaying

the old trackbed would again be no problem.

A reopened Dulverton station would serve a very wide community, but Mr Duddridge is correct in describing the rest of the old route to Taunton as having a "low intermediate population".

But there is an alternative, which in addition would give both South Molton and Bampton convenient rail access rather than miles away. Put new track down the old Exe Valley line to Tiverton (which has expanded beyond all recognition since its rail services were axed) and then across to the main line, joining near the old Tiverton Junction, with junctions in both directions, to Exeter for commuter/local traffic, and to Taunton for long distance traffic to London and the north.

Just as a postscript, when the island platforms at Taunton station were reopened a few years ago, and the platforms re-numbered, the old Barnstaple branch platform was numbered one, although to my knowledge no passenger trains have since used it. Does somebody somewhere know something we don't?

*Philip Shelton, 11 Rooks Farm Road, Yelland, Barnstaple, Devon EX31 3EQ
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Gerard Duddridge replies: Railfuture Devon and Cornwall is not considering a second rail route to Barnstaple. The intermediate towns have a low population (South Molton 4,135 and Dulverton 1,486). Restoring 43 miles of track via Dulverton represents poor value for money. Only 42 miles of new track would restore Bideford, Tiverton and Sidmouth to the rail network, and link up Okehampton to Bere Alston. Reopening just the link from Tiverton to the main line at Tiverton Junction would serve more people than all the intermediate stations between Barnstaple and Taunton.

Even if Britain had a rolling programme of 100 miles of new railway per year, it would be two or three decades before a second route to Barnstaple could be prioritised. If new track was laid alongside the North Devon link road (A361 Barnstaple to South Molton), as suggested by Mr Shelton, there would be the additional expense of rebuilding the Lileigh Waterrow viaducts.

The only realistic option is the current route via Exeter, perhaps with some direct Barnstaple to Taunton trains via a new chord at Cowley Bridge Junction.

Time for action



Railfuture relies on volunteers and members for campaigning. We can all make the case for rail at every opportunity but here are some more ideas for members:

1 Two thirds of the public are against bigger lorries but the Government is being asked to increase lorry sizes to a whopping 60 tonnes. Find out about the horrifying plan on Aslef's website at <http://www.aslef.org.uk/C2B/Pressoffice/display.asp?ID=192> This link takes you to a fact sheet giving the case against bigger lorries. You could use the information to write a polite letter to your MPs asking them to oppose the idea

2 Fill out a Railfuture recruitment leaflet for a friend or even several friends and give it to them.

3 Put a copy of *Railwatch* in your local doctor's surgery, library, town hall or community building. Always ask permission. Additional copies of *Railwatch* for this purpose can be obtained from the editors.

4 Find out who your local rail managers are and send them a copy of *Railwatch*. If they would like to receive a copy on a regular basis and pass on the information to David Harby (address page 2).

5 Recommend a rail journey to a friend and give them with a detailed journey plan and information about any reduced price tickets that would be available.

News in brief

Volunteer Christopher Parker is to be Railfuture's treasurer following the resignation of Tony Sheward. Members have reason to be grateful for Tony's steady hand on the tiller as Railfuture's ship ploughed through choppy seas over the past few years. Tony's wise counsel will be greatly missed by the Railfuture board.

Chris Precey – who has done a stalwart job with the Railfuture annual draw for two years – will be returning officer for the 2006 Railfuture elections.

The Railfuture board is seeking a volunteer secretary to the board. It's a chance to become actively involved with Railfuture's campaigning heart. Please contact chairman Mike Crowhurst.

The Railfuture rail users conference will be held in Manchester on Saturday 5 November. Details are on the enclosed leaflet and on the Railfuture website. Members are welcome but the conference is also open to members of the public.

Railfuture's annual general meeting will be held at Swindon Railway Museum on Saturday 6 May.

The Railfuture board is working on a corporate business plan which, it hopes, will give the society the opportunity to attract more sponsorship. Even though we are working on a business plan and aspire to professional standards, Railfuture remains a voluntary organisation dependent on its members for action and campaigns.

It appears that the Post Office has failed to re-direct at least some of the post sent to Railfuture's former office in Dalston, London. If anyone has sent anything to the office and not received a response please write or email again. The contact addresses are on page 2 of *Railwatch*.